

Lindsay Anderson

A kitsch anonymous motel-styled room at the White Heron seemed a strange setting for Lindsay Anderson, the director of such celebrated cinematic assaults on the British establishment as *If* and *O Lucky Man*. Anderson's screen work, discounting his early documentaries, has been occasional (four feature films in almost twenty years) but prestigious, and his new film *Britannia Hospital* is due for New Zealand release later this month.

The film's origins lie in the staffing crisis at the Charing Cross Hospital a few years back. Not strikes for more wages, as Anderson wryly comments, but founded on the staff's dissatisfaction with certain well-heeled patients paying for and receiving superior service and accommodation in a National Health institution.

That the hospital of the film is a symbol of something bigger goes without saying, and Anderson indicates that his field of reference is the widest possible. When Professor Millar is giving his final lecture and revealing his brainchild, Genesis, it is mankind itself that he is addressing as the camera roams around the faces in the lecture theatre audience.

And what faces there are in the film! Vivian Pickles, Joan Plowright, Dandy Nichols, Betty Marsden, Arthur Clough (in his last screen role), Valentine Dyal — talents seen far too rarely on the cinema screen. Anderson points out how *Britannia Hospital* uses actors from most of his various stage and screen productions. Out of his lively West End production of Orton's *What the Butler Saw* which I caught up with in London in early 1976, he used all but one of the stage cast in the new film.

Cinema is an art-form of great personal commitment to the



Malcolm McDowell, 'Britannia Hospital'



Lindsay Anderson

director, and this brought up the thorny issue of Politics and Art. Although some minds today consider all art should have political foundations, Anderson prefers to see it rising from social feelings and issues — as did *Britannia Hospital*. He brings up the matter of Brecht, in whose work the conflict of artist and polemicist is particularly apparent. Brecht may instruct us to see the moral justification of Mother Courage left alone at the end of the play but, as an artist, he can't help but build up sympathy for this isolated figure.

Anderson mentions the British director Ken Loach whose film-making career is limited by the

overt political content of his material, where perhaps a little more ambition would take Loach into a wider field of reference.

Britannia Hospital has enough material for three or four films, its director states. He agrees with that element of theatricality that runs through the film with everyone consciously "performing", whether it be the manic Millar constantly delivering his spiel to the ever-present television crew, the megaphone orations of the protesters or the frenetic preparations inside the hospital for H.R.H.'s impending visit. Anderson names the style heightened realism with elements of caricature. Caricature which becomes broader and broader — as the film progresses — one representative from the palace turns out to be actor John Bett as a wonderfully limp Lady Felicity and Anderson is particularly pleased with the result of pairing the "lady" with a midget playing the irascible Sir Anthony.

There are links with the earlier film *O Lucky Man*. Malcolm McDowell again plays the Mick Travis character, although he comes to a rather unfortunate and particularly gory end in the hospital. Alan Price again provides the music and Anderson outlines the circumstances under which he met the musician. The director had caught up with the new pop aesthetic in the late sixties when it seemed to him that pop music had found a new lyricism, as seen in the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper*. He had not been familiar with the work of the Animals, but Price's music in its intense lyricism and eclecticism with strong folk and church roots appealed to Anderson. He invited Price to do a score for his Royal Court production of David Storey's play *Home*, and from that grew Alan Price's involvement in *O Lucky Man* both as an actor and composer — a fine score with Price's songs totally integrated into this most Brechtian of films.

A comment on the successful television airings of his films, brought forth Anderson's views on this medium. His video film of

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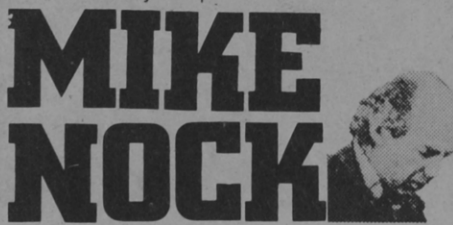
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